

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 00236 220454Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 DEAE-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 IO-13
JUSE-00 NSAE-00 CTME-00 SNM-05 TRSE-00 USIA-06
NSC-05 OES-07 OMB-01 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 /099 W
-----112757 220458Z /15

R 220400Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9036
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL UDORN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0236

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PINR SNAR LA
SUBJECT: SHAKEUP IN THE LPDR MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE

REF: VIENTIANE 0078

1. KHAMTA PHOMSENGSAVANH, DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL COMMERCE
(FOREIGN TRADE) AT THE LAO MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND
COMMERCE, WAS REPORTEDLY ARRESTED FOR CORRUPTION AT THE
END OF JANUARY.

2. THE LAO INFORMATION MINISTRY DAILY BULLETIN
FEBRUARY 15 REPORTED THAT KHAMMA PHOMKONG, IDENTIFIED
AS VICE MINISTER OF THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND
COMMERCE HAD THAT DAY WELCOMED A VISITING SOVIEPE
ECONOMIC DELEGATION AT VIENTIANE'S WATTAY AIRPORT.
KHAMMA HAD PREVIOUSLY SERVED AS LAO AMBASSADOR IN
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PAGE 02 VIENTI 00236 220454Z

PHNOM PENH, PRECEDING THE CURRENT LAO AMBASSADOR THERE.

3. A FOREIGN BUSINESSMAN IN LAOS TOLD US THAT DURING
THE WEEK OF JANUARY 29, THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND
COMMERCE, MAYSOUK SAYSOMPHENG, HAD BEEN CRITICIZED AT A
MINISTRY MEETING BY ACTING PRIME MINISTER NOUHAK PHOUM-

SAVAN. ANOTHER BUSINESSMAN TOLD US IN THE SAME TIME PERIOD THAT ALTHOUGH MAYSOUK WOULD RETAIN THE TITLE OF MINISTER, HE HAD IN FACT BEEN DEMOTED.

4. COMMENT: THE ABOVE DEVELOPMENTS FOLLOW BY LESS THAN THREE WEEKS THE ARREST, REPORTED REFTTEL, OF FOUR RANKING OFFICIALS IN THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE. WHILE THERE APPEARS TO BE STRONG INDICIATION THAT AT LEAST THE FIRST FOUR ARRESTS WERE THE RESULT OF CORRUPTION ON THE PART OF THOSE ARRESTED, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS ALSO MAY BE INVOLVED IN THE ONGOING MINISTRY SHAKE UP. DURING THE PAST SIX MONTHS OR SO WE HAVE NOTICED THAT THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN SEVERAL POWER PLAYS WITH OTHER MINISTRIES AND WITH THE

VIENTIANE PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE. IN NEARLY ALL CASES THAT WE KNOW ABOUT, THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE HAS COME OUT ON THE LOSING END. IT FORFEITED ITS ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAWMILLS AND SMALL HANDICRAFT FACTORIES TO THE VIENTIANE PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE, AND IT LOST CONTROL OF THE JAPANESE LOGGING FIRM INVESTMENT PROJECT TO THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE. IN ADDITION, THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OPERATES A SCRAP-METAL EXPORTING BUSINESS FOR PROFIT THAT UNDERMINES THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 VIENTI 00236 220454Z

MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE'S AGRICULTURAL TOOL FOUNDRY PROJECT. (THE EMBASSY IS POUCHING AN AIRGRAM THAT DESCRIBES INTRA-GOVERNMENTAL SQUABBLES AND REPORTS EXAMPLES OF PROBLEMS THAT THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE HAS BEEN HAVING WITH OTHER MINISTRIES AND WITH THE VIENTIANE PROVINCIAL ADMINSTATION.)

5. KHAMTA (PARA 1) REPORTEDLY HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE ILLEGAL SALE OF NARCOTICS ON BEHALF OF THE LPDR TO FOREIGN BUSINESSMEN. ROBERTS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES, PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978VIENTI00236
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780079-0488
Format: TEL
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780225/aaaaavbp.tel
Line Count: 107
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: a5769ed1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 VIENTIANE 78
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3513376
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SHAKEUP IN THE LPDR MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE
TAGS: PGOV, PINR, SNAR, LA
To: STATE BANGKOK
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a5769ed1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014